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Changing Perspectives of Urbanity during Socialism and after: the Case of Two Neighborhoods in Skopje

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Introduction

The transformation of the built environment under different societal organizations and the shift from socialist to post-socialist system of organization and decision-making in cities is manifested through an emergence of developments that are critical in understanding the system in which they are occurring.¹ Construction of housing after World War II in the European context has been an important tool for national re-consolidation. In socialist countries with centrally planned economies, the construction and allocation of housing was a tool for establishing an egalitarian society and “socialist states declared it their top priority: the right to housing became incorporated into the basic rights of citizens.”² The construction and the allocation of housing units was one of the most important spatial manifestations of the state ideologies,³ and through housing programs that were set at a national level, authorities attempted to house the growing number of people that were moving into cities. As a result, in a short period of time, large housing estates with prefabricated units and standardized apartments were built and became a dominant feature of the urban landscapes of socialist cities.⁴ In these cases, through such developments, the role of architecture changed as well, “from a tool of political representation into an instrument of social reform, expected to facilitate a breakthrough in social modernization.”⁵

After 1989, the transition to the market economy has been a complex process to which countries in Central and Eastern Europe were adjusting. This period after the fall of state socialism is also manifested with changes in the housing stock in former socialist cities that can be observed not only through the transformation of ownership structure of housing units, but also through diverse patterns of intensification of the construction activities in the housing sector.⁶

1 Jasna Stefanovska, “Planning the Post-socialist City: Urban Transformations and Changing Centralities After Socialism: Dissertation” (PhD diss., 2014).

2 Virág Molnár, *Building the State: Architecture, Politics, and State Formation in Postwar Central Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 70.

3 David M. Smith, “The socialist city,” in *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, ed. G. Andrusz et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 70-99; Anneli Kährlik and Tiit Tammaru, “Soviet prefabricated panel housing estates: Areas of continued social mix or decline? The case of Tallinn,” in *Housing Studies* 25, 2 (2010): 201-219.

4 György Enyedi, “Transformation in Central European post socialist cities,” in *Social Change and Urban Restructuring in Central Europe*, ed. G. Enyedi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1998); Herman Kok and Zoltan Kovacs, “The process of suburbanization in the agglomeration of Budapest,” *Netherlands Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 14, 2 (1999): 119-141.

5 Molnár, *Building the State*, 70.

6 Peter Marcuse, “Privatization and its discontents: Property rights in land and housing in the transition in Eastern Europe,” in *Cities after Socialism*, 119-191; Raymond J. Struyk, “Housing privatization in the former Soviet bloc to 1995,” in *Cities after Socialism*, 192-213.

And, as in other cities, peripheral developments also emerged as a particular aspect of urban growth of the post-socialist city.⁷

After the fall of socialism, in the initial phase of the newly established system, officials relied on decentralized decision-making processes and supported market-driven development projects with the intent of attracting and creating investments in cities; however, these did not necessarily always protect the public interest. As a result, the role of the urban planner was undermined and planning became a developer and market driven practice, a financial venture that is servicing the private sector, often too difficult to control, further contributing to the crisis in the profession's legitimacy.⁸ The increased bureaucratization of the profession and the conflicts that existed among different levels of decision-making in post-socialist contexts resulted in a city that is fragmented and demands for an urgent re-thinking of the role of the planner.

The developments in Skopje and the city's urban restructuring after World War II were not an exception from these trends. After the war the city of Skopje witnessed significant changes in the patterns and intensity of urban developments, which were paralleled to the political and societal changes that were ongoing at a national level. During this period, the construction of housing units in Skopje took place in two waves that corresponded with changes in the organization of the state. The first one was through an instilment of socialist ideals and growing urbanization witnessed on a national level. During this period of growth, the construction of new neighborhoods and housing units was overseen by a state-controlled housing agency.

The second wave of development in the city of Skopje came after 1991 and following the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In this period, the city of Skopje became the capital city of the independent Republic of Macedonia, and as a result of the institutional re-centering, the city's built fabric turned into a testing ground for new developments subjected to the market economy and real-estate interests. During this period, private developers were guiding Skopje urban developments that materialized as in-fills of housing units; these appeared either within the boundary of the city or as housing estates in its outskirts.

The neighborhoods in Skopje that emerged during and after the period of state socialism illustrate the changing relationship between politics and urban environment through which housing, in the first period, was contributing to the social changes, while after socialism and since the 1990s it became merely a commodity. The different values attributed to housing contributed to the changing perception towards the neighborhoods, generating a different understanding of urbanity within the city boundary, also as a result of the complex relationship between the built and the un-built fabric of the city.

In this paper, different aspects of urbanity will be studied, revealing the intricate relationship between the built and the un-built in the city as a source of public life. For the purpose of this research, these aspects will be studied through the a) connectivity, referring to the density of the links in the movement networks on the scale of a neighborhood, creating resilient urban areas; b) diversity of the urban construct, referring to a diverse morphology of the neighborhood's built fabric and a variety of the corresponding uses and c) the quality of the areas in-between the buildings referring to the quality of the public spaces that contribute to the quality of life and will address how the urban form influences the creation of urban and public life in the neighborhoods in the city of Skopje.

The urban restructuring of Skopje related to its housing construction is under-documented and studies on the scale of a neighborhood in the city are lacking. The case study neighborhoods

7 Janez Koželj, "Opredelitev sodobnega mesta" [Defining the modern city], in *O urbanizmu: Kaj se dogaja s sodobnim mestom* [On urbanism: What is happening with the contemporary city], ed. I. Cerpes et al. (Ljubljana: Založba Krtina, 2007), 195-208; Kadri Leetmaa and Tiit Tammaru, "Suburbanization in countries in transition: Destinations of suburbanizers in the Tallinn metropolitan area," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 89, 2 (2007): 127-146.

8 Drago Kos, "Prostorsko urejanje med stroko in piarom" [Spatial planning between the profession and PR], *Teor. praksa* 47, 2-3 (2010): 413-434.

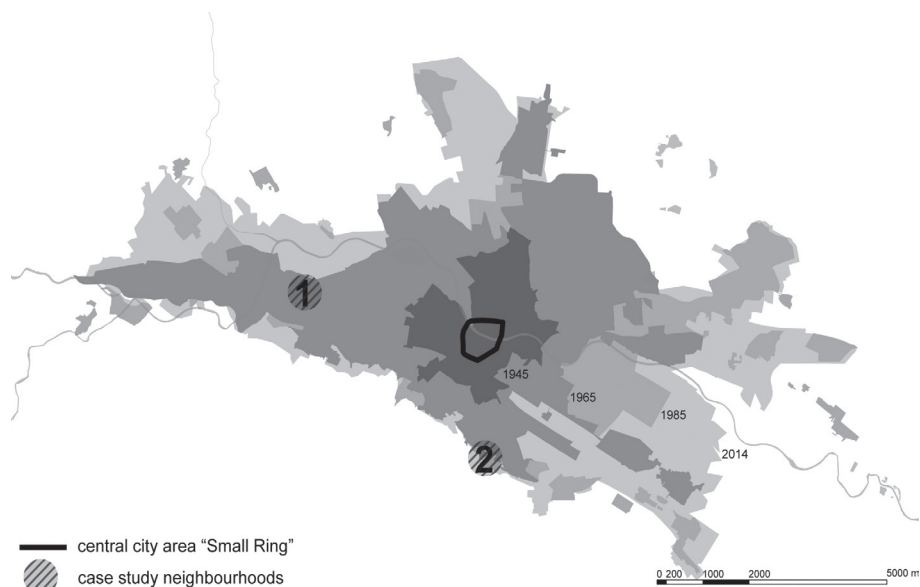


Fig. 1: The city of Skopje and its dynamics of spatial growth after the World War II. Outlined are the city center and the case study neighborhoods, 1) Karpoš and 2) Panorama

selected in this research, Karpoš and Panorama, will provide an overview of the building activities in the housing sector throughout the period of state socialism and after (Fig.1).

The first part of this paper examines the context of housing construction during the period of state socialism in Skopje, exploring the notions of urbanity through a study of the neighborhood Karpoš which was built during this period. The second part of the paper focuses on the post-socialist expansion of the city and will explore the emergence of new housing developments in Panorama, in the city's outskirts. The concluding part discusses the implications of the housing construction and their performance features which resulted in new perspectives of urbanity on a scale of a neighborhood and public life in different periods of state organization and under the influence of different ideologies.

Constructing the Socialist Urbanity in Skopje

The instilment of socialist ideals and the formation of Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945 (in 1963 the country became Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) resulted in growing urbanization records observed on national level and with growth of capital cities noted throughout the country.⁹ Likewise the city of Skopje grew, and its growth rates have been among the highest recorded on national level among the capital cities of all the Yugoslav republics.¹⁰ During this period, the city of Skopje became the third largest city in Yugoslavia, following Belgrade and Zagreb;¹¹ its records of growth were astounding, more than fourfold over a period of just forty years. In the period from 1953 to 1991 the city grew from 120,130 citizens to 444,760 (Table 1). This growth was fostered by the industrialization programs and the city developed into a centre for metallurgical, chemical and pharmaceutical industries.

⁹ Jiri Musil, *Urbanization in socialist countries* (White Plains, New York: Sharpe, 1980).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jasna Stefanovska and Janez Koželj, "Urban planning and transitional development issues: The case of Skopje, Macedonia," *Urbani Izvizi* 23, 1 (2012): 91-100.

Year	Population in the city of Skopje	Total amount of housing units in the city of Skopje	Relationship between the city's population and the amount of housing units
1948	88,355	n/a	n/a
1953	120,130	n/a	n/a
1961	166,870	n/a	n/a
1971	314,552	79,750	3.94
1981	448,200	101,054	4.43
1991	444,760	132,865	3.34
2002	506,926	163,745	3.09

Table 1: Population dynamics, total amount of housing units and their relationship throughout the years in the city of Skopje
Source: State Statistical office of the Republic of Macedonia

Note: The relationship between city's population and the amount of housing units is according to our calculation

The construction of neighborhoods that would become home of the new dwellers coming to Skopje was seen as a materialization of the socialist ideals; housing provision was one of the requirements set at a national level, which officials of the socialist city were expected to provide to the inhabitants. A state-controlled agency, Self-governing interest association (Mk. *Samoupravna interesna zaednica, SIZ*), was in charge of the realization of the state programs for housing. According to the Law of the Self-managing Interest Association on housing from 1974, Article 5, such an association was in charge of "1. Determining the policy of housing construction in accordance with state plans on socio-political communities; 2. Programs and organizes housing construction; 3. Defines the program and distributes funds for housing construction for the participants in the World War II; 4. Defines the program and distributes funds for financing housing construction and improvement of the conditions of housing in the existing residential buildings and apartments."¹² Funding for housing estates built during this period was set through national legislation as well and according to Article 3 of the Law for the Separation and Deployment of Resources to Meet the Residential Needs from 1981; those funds were allocated from the personal income and were at the rate of 3%.¹³

The centralized planning system certainly helped in accelerating the decision-making processes about the location and inner organization of the new neighborhoods in Skopje as the planning authorities were expected to react quickly to housing shortages.

In the newly established context after the World War II, Macedonian authorities invited the Czechoslovakian modernist architect and urban planner Ludjek Kubes to conduct the drafting process of the new master plan for the city of Skopje. The plan from 1948 proposed a bold new vision of imagined urbanity for the city, with free standing buildings and functional zones, according to the trends from that period and strongly influenced by Le Corbusier's *Radiant City* plan (fr. *La Ville Radieuse*) of 1935.¹⁴ The plan devised an expansion of the city in the East-West direction along the River Vardar and, in an attempt to accommodate the city's spatial and demographic growth, new neighborhoods were planned.

Prefabrication of housing units in Skopje started immediately after World War II and a factory for prefabricated units was built in 1948 with the aim of speeding up these processes. The prefabricated housing unit seemed to represent an 'ideal' way to accelerate the construction processes and to respond to housing shortage in the city.

Housing production in Skopje increased after 1963. On July 26, 1963, a devastating earthquake struck the city of Skopje, causing a tremendous damage to its urban fabric and taking the lives

¹² Branislav Krstic and Dusan Pajovic, *Zakonodavstvo urbaznizma, arhitekture, bastine, prostornog uređenja, covjekove sredine* [Legislation of urbanism, architecture, heritage, spatial planning, environment] (Belgrade: Naučna knjiga, 1987), 524.

¹³ Ibid., 509.

¹⁴ Le Corbusier, *La ville radieuse* (Paris: Editions de l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui, Fréal, 1935).

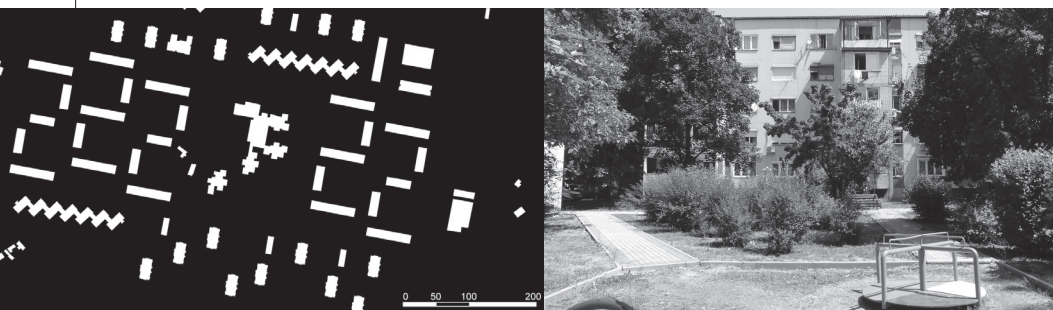


Fig.2: Figure-ground of a Karpoš neighborhood in Skopje

Fig.3: Karpoš neighborhood in Skopje constructed from prefabricated units during the period of state socialism

of more than a thousand people. The housing sector was severely struck; around 80,7 per cent of the housing stock in the city was destroyed or heavily damaged.¹⁵ The construction of housing after the earthquake was therefore of the utmost priority and in a period of two years, until 1965, 22,250 new housing units were built in the city and around 16,000 were refurbished. At the same time eighteen new neighborhoods emerged in Skopje.¹⁶

In the period that followed, more housing units were built, 35,500 housing units were constructed in the period of 10 years, until July 26, 1973.¹⁷ This was a rapid enlargement of the city's housing stock, doubling in a short period of time, since before the earthquake the city had only a total of 36,578 housing units.¹⁸ In the same period, the city's population grew from 166,870 in 1961 to 314,552 citizens in 1971 (Table 1). These processes of change generated at the same time a new understanding of urbanity in the ever-expanding city.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, in 1963, a factory for manufacturing prefabricated housing units was donated by the SSSR to the people of Skopje, and was placed in the old factory for prefabricated units, built in 1948. The new factory could build up to 1,200 apartments per year and in the process of reconstruction around 14,000 units were prefabricated. Thanks to this, the recovery has "begun ten days after the earthquake, when the first demountable dwellings arrived as gifts from abroad. Mr. R. Fitzmaurice (United Kingdom), an expert in house prefabrication, was one of the first consultant engineers to be sent to Skopje by the United Nations."¹⁹

Karpoš was one of the neighborhoods that emerged in Skopje during this period (Fig.2). Built on a broad plot of a land that was nationalized, the area was designated predominantly for housing and the vacant land dominated over the built up area. The blocks of housing units in this neighborhood are built from prefabricated concrete panels that were stuck on top of each other, and were built in the factory that was donated to the city after the earthquake (Fig.3). This industrialized model of construction became home to many in Skopje; the housing units were uniform and standardized, the housing blocks were positioned freely in the green area and in these neighborhoods public amenities were provided as well. In fact, the construction of panel housing was dominating the construction of housing stock in Skopje during this period and their construction resulted in homogenous urban environments over the territory of the city. The overall connectivity models in Karpoš are following strict hierarchy of the movement networks in an orthogonal grid (Fig.4), and the morphology of the urban construct is repetitive and monotonous, resulting in notions of urbanity over the neighborhood that are replicated as well.

15 ***, *Skopje – grad na solidarnosta* [Skopje – city of solidarity] (Skopje: The City Assembly of Skopje, 1975).

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 United Nations Development Program, *Skopje resurgent: the story of a United Nations Special Fund Town planning project* (New York: United Nations, 1970), 93.

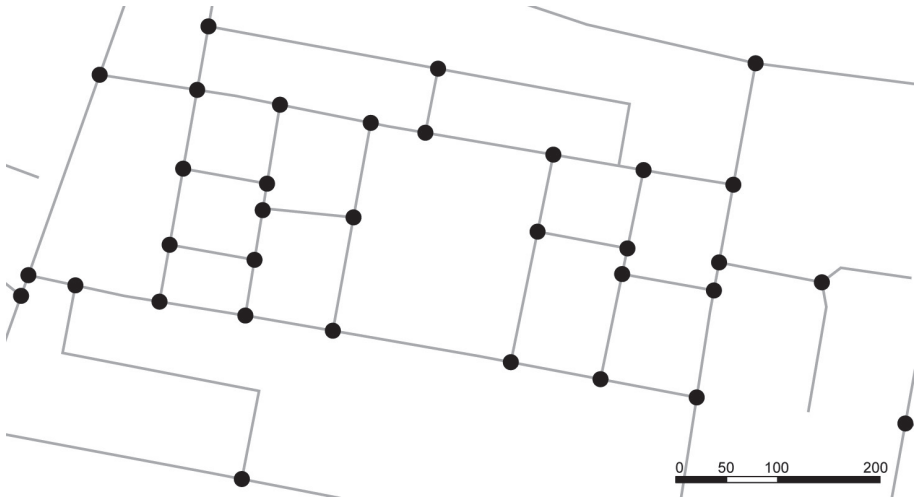


Fig. 4: Measuring connectivity: crossing density in Karpoš

The construction of Karpoš in Skopje after 1963 illustrates the need of quick response to the housing shortage in the destroyed city of Skopje, but also interest in prefabrication all over Yugoslavia during this period. This interest resulted in more than 50 different typologies for these units built in Skopje, coming from factories from anywhere in Yugoslavia (and from abroad), but also using the local knowledge for prefabrication. Through these processes, new neighborhoods in the city were built and Skopje expanded its territory by replicating urban morphologies and constructing urban environments that would house many. Prefabricated units sped up the process of city rebuilding after World War II and Edvard Kardelj, the President of the Federal Parliament, quipped that “this type of temporary and rapidly constructed unit should become a standard element of housing policy.”²⁰ The rapid growth of capital cities in Yugoslavia certainly was ready for these recommendations.

The Production of Post-socialist Urbanity in Skopje

After the fall of state socialism and the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, there were radical processes of transformation of the built fabric of the cities, which were initiated and originated in the political, economic and societal changes. The re-introduction of land and property market further contributed to the changing patterns of development with a different pace in the city of Skopje.²¹

In the early 1990s, private capital and market economy were central to the growth and development processes. The transformation towards the market economy and the re-introduction of private land ownership required the establishment of a new planning system with a decentralized decision-making mechanism, able to gear changes impacting on the structure and the form of the city of Skopje. Therefore, the transformation of the built environment was predominantly the result of the actions of the market economy and of the ideologies of the real-estate interests.

Despite these societal changes, the growth rates of the city's population continued after 1991 and in the period until 2002, Skopje's population grew from 444,760 in 1991 to 506,926 in 2002 (Table 1). The number of housing units in the city was ever increasing as well and it was growing at a higher rate than the population in the city. As a result, the relationship between city's population and the amount of housing units was decreasing (Table 1).

20 Jack C. Fisher, “The Reconstruction of Skopje,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 30, 1 (1964): 48.

21 Stefanovska and Koželj, “Urban planning.”

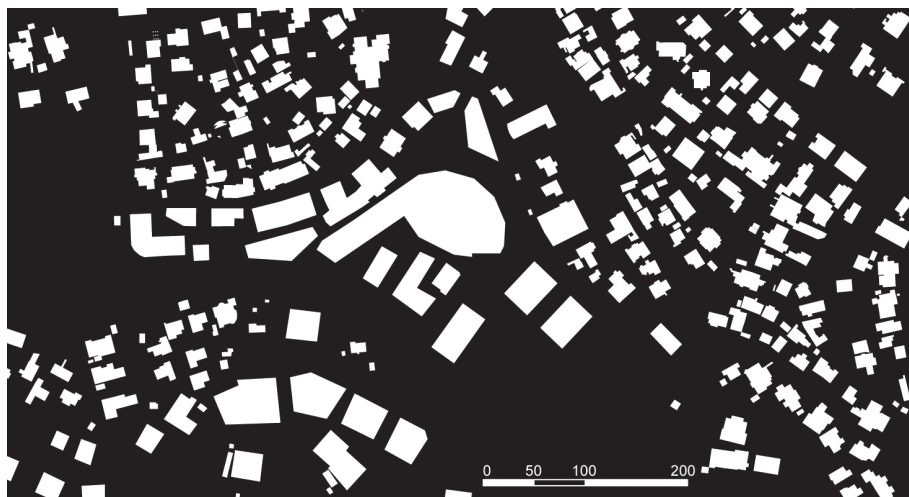


Fig.5: Figure-ground of Panorama neighborhood at the edge of Skopje

The restitution of properties, i.e. the return to the initial owners of the properties that were expropriated after the World War II, created large percentages of private land owners. Consequently, these conditions created a base for different patterns of development and emergence of numerous private developers that were constructing individual and multifamily dwellings in the city's urban fabric; large scale housing construction was limited to a very few areas in the outskirts of Skopje. These new housing constructs in the form of large villas, multifamily dwellings, gated communities or conglomerates of apartments in the outskirts of the city formed upscale neighborhoods and generated new forms of collectivity in Skopje, producing at the same time new forms of urbanity.



Fig.6: Panorama neighborhood in the outskirts of Skopje displaying massive apartment blocks and sprawling urban landscapes

Panorama is one of the neighborhoods that emerged in the outskirts of the city after 2000 and its construction resulted in spatial and social polarization in the city (Fig.5). The outflow of people to Skopje's outskirts in the case of Panorama is in a neighborhood that is spatially disconnected as a result of the hilly terrain (Fig.6), and in it there is a neglect of public life, impacting on the overall

built *milieu* of the city. Public space in Panorama was overlooked since the beginning of drafting of the master plan for that area, public buildings are absent and, as a result, the neighborhood at present functions as a dormitory. This neighborhood is one of the models of urbanity of the 21st century, contributing to the Skopje's sprawling landscapes and its spatial reconfiguration, also as a symbol of the democratization of the planning processes. Equally, Panorama also illustrates the current crisis of this type of neighborhoods, which lack connectivity due to scarce links among the movement networks resulting in large areas that cannot be reached (Fig.7). Public space and amenities are limited and the quality of these areas in-between the buildings is disregarded.

Panorama also illustrates the crisis in post 1991 urbanity in Skopje; housing during this period became a venture for speculative developments, where profit is guiding their emergence, ultimately causing polarization of the city in which the income inequality is spatially manifested as well.

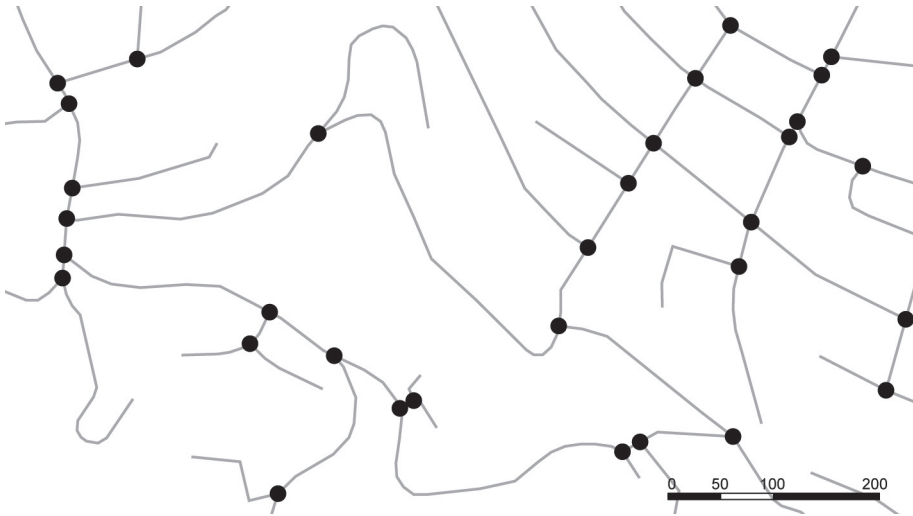


Fig.7: Measuring connectivity: crossing density in Panorama

Changing Perspectives of Urbanity During Socialism and After: Impacts on Skopje's Cityscape

The fragmentation of the urban fabric in Skopje as a result of the developments happening at different pace and under different organizational and societal systems provides a rupture of the notion of urbanity in the city. Throughout state socialism, the centrally planned economy was guiding the developments in the city; in contrast, after 1991, the market is a driving force behind all the developments, guided by real-estate interests and a myriad of private developers.

The uniformity of the prefabricated housing estates and the creation of functional neighborhoods that were built throughout the period of socialism in Skopje generated particular models of urbanity that can be observed in the neighborhoods where units were built from prefabricated concrete panels. The buildings were uniform and standardized and were all freely deployed over large green areas.

After the fall of state socialism, the uniformity and the repetitive footprints that were present in socialist housing estates were abandoned, and in the emerging capitalist housing morphologies, the complex spatial relationships of the new neighborhoods in Skopje have been characterized by lack of access to services and lack of public spaces.

The newly built neighborhoods in the city discourage urbanity; there is no provision of public amenities and the infrastructure does not allow any other form of spatial mobility except for a private vehicle. These new neighborhoods are critical experiments of 'new' urbanism in Skopje and a testing ground for the twenty-first century urban configurations in which the people will live together. Their density, design features and spatial layout are an outcome of a complex interplay between many actors, ideologies, interests, choices and political priorities.

In the case of Skopje, at present, there is an erosion of urbanity, which results from the neoliberal planning and such condition highlights the need to rethink the way we construct our neighborhoods in the future. Accordingly, critical attention should be given to the connectivity at a scale of a neighborhood and the creation of resilient urban areas, the diversity of the urban construct and the quality of the areas in-between the buildings and the public space, as powerful indicators of urbanity, shaping citizens, actions and experiences of urban life.

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